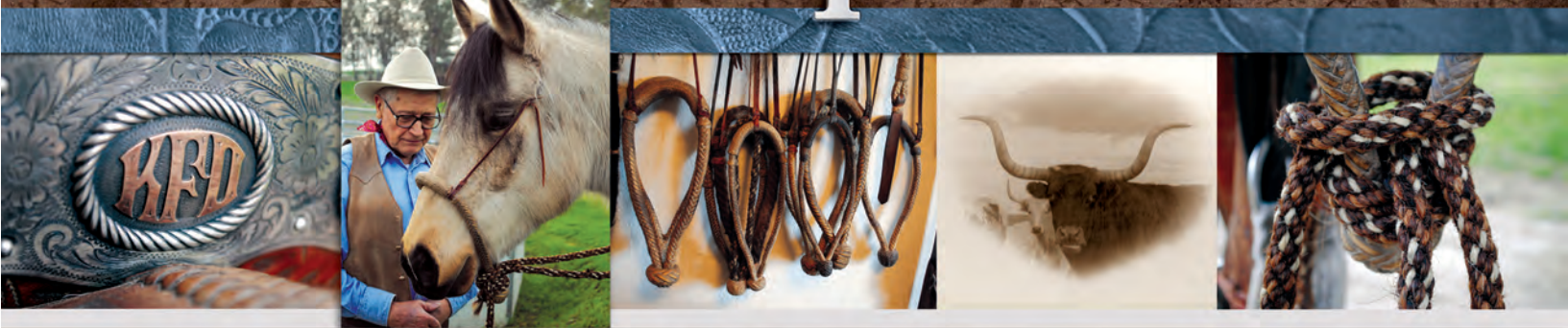




# Dean of the Living Vaqueros



*There are many “Bridle” horsemen involved in today’s resurgence of “California” training. Eighty-five-year-old Ray Ordway, however, provides one of the few living ties to the original vaqueros. He walked, talked and lived with the original masters and descends from a 125 year vaquero family culture. The Morgan Horse honors him, as he has honored the Morgan horse.*

**By Brenda L. Tippin • Introduction by Col. John Hutcheson**



**Main photo:** Vaqueros and brothers Ray, Kent and Jack Ordway in Merced, California, 1950.  
**Inset (left to right):** Silver detail on the cantle of Kent Ordway’s fabled 1937 Olson Nolte saddle; Ray with his young Morgan “Henry” now in hackamore training; Some of Ray’s bosals; Ranch hands remember cattle as well as horses. Charlie the steer, photographed at Harris Ranch when Ray worked there in 1971, was a favorite for his perfect horns, huge size and gentle personality, all of which earned his mounted head and horns the place of honor over the bar at the Harris Ranch Restaurant off Interstate 5 at Coalinga, California; A handmade, horsehair mecate tied on a bosal.





There is a unique historical relationship between ranching and Morgans in the Great Basin. The 400-year-old traditions of Spanish horsemanship met the Morgan horse around the turn of the 20th century on the great remaining ranches of California such as the Tehachapi Land and Cattle Company, when Roland Hill brought his first train load of Morgans up from Richard Sellman's Mountainvale, Texas, ranch. Arnold Rojas, author of "These Were the Vaqueros," lists Mr. Hill as one of the last true masters of the art. It may be no surprise that the late Ray Hunt learned much of his horsemanship working on the cowboy crew for Mr. Hill. Today, there are only a handful of trainers who can take a horse full up "into the bridle" the old vaquero way. Mike Bridges, Richard Caldwell, Buck Brannaman, Pat Puckett, Sheila Varian and young Martin Black are among the well known who have the knowledge and skill to take a horse through multiple hackamore sizes to the two-rein to straight up (in the bit alone) as a true "bridle horse" in the vaquero tradition. But the "Real McCoy" is Ray Ordway, age 85, dean of the yet living vaqueros (pronounced buh-kare-oh, Anglicized to buckaroo), who learned from his Castilian speaking father Ira, and from his uncles, who all rode for the Rancho Jesus Maria (now Vandenberg AFB) in Santa Barbara County, and from his own older brothers, Kent and Oliver. These were men who were masters of the reata and the spade bit and were of the ilk so wonderfully described by Rojas in his famous book. Today, Ray is acknowledged as a top hand who has trained many using horses over a long lifetime but has a heart for the Morgan because of his personal experience with them "far from the madding crowd," when being "well mounted" often meant the difference in his safety as well as his ability to earn a living. Pat Parelli acknowledges Ray as one of his influential mentors and told me personally how close he is to Ray and his wife LaVerne. When I met Ray in 2006, I was reminded that some of the greatest horsemen are unknown to the public because they don't promote themselves and don't show. They know who they are. They know what they know. And they do not have a deep-seated need to prove it to anyone else. All these men have in common a genuine love for the horse, a lifelong desire to learn and study, and are gentlemen in every sense of the word, willing to share with others their knowledge as a matter of honor. To the essence of their beings they are old school in their ways and their sense of honor about all things. Ray Ordway is a living example of such a man. I am grateful *The Morgan Horse* has chosen to honor him.

Col. John Hutcheson

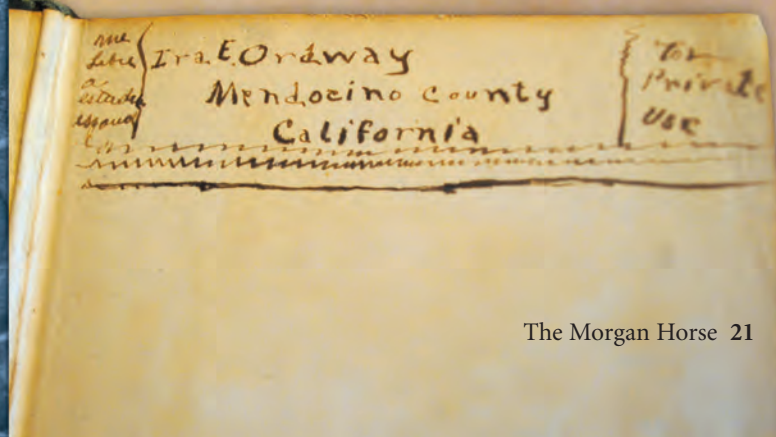


**T**he Legacy of the California vaquero goes hand in hand with the early development of the Morgan breed in the settlement of the West. With origins dating back to the 8th century when the Moors conquered Spain, this legacy became far more than just a



## Family Photos

Top to bottom:  
Ollie, Ray, Jack, Ira,  
Kent and their  
cook, Vasco Ranch,  
1948; Ray Ordway  
as a working vaque-  
ro in 1982; Kent  
Ordway and his  
best bridle horse,  
Keno, sired by one  
of Hill's Morgans at  
Oak Flat Ranch,  
1939; Flyleaf  
Spanish book used  
by Ray's father, Ira  
Ordway, 1907.







style of horsemanship. The vaqueros had tremendous pride in their work and in the equipment they used to finish and train their horses, and this knowledge was carefully guarded and passed on from father to son, or from one horseman who mentored another as a matter of honor.

The focus of the California vaquero was a natural style of horsemanship built on respect and trust. The vaquero felt he had all the time in the world, and patiently spent years finishing a bridle horse. Development of huge “ranchos” from land grants began in 1784 and continued into the 1840s. Many of these were thousands of acres in size, some even 30,000 to 40,000 acres or more. Work for the vaquero was abundant; his ways were born of necessity, and were a way of life that endured for more than a century.

Following World War II, many of these big ranchos were sold; demand for the vaquero skills decreased, and the art would have been lost but for the dedication of a handful of men who learned firsthand from the original vaquero masters, and who sought to place this valuable knowledge in the hands of those who would carry on the traditions of horsemanship and use of the reata to future generations. Vaquero horsemanship has thus experienced a rebirth in the last several years.

## Ray Ordway

Among the last of the true vaqueros, Raymond Ordway stands alone as a modern day legend whose life-long passion has been to preserve these traditions and pass on the great store of knowledge he has gathered, which was passed down through his family for more than 125 years.

The Ordway family came to California in 1870; Ray's father was Ira Ordway. Ira was born in Santa Cruz County, California in 1879. When he was 14, Ira joined his older brothers Ed and Adolph in the cattle business, working on the historic Rancho Jesus Maria cattle ranch in Santa Barbara County, for which they paid him \$5 per month. At that time, the 42,149 acre Rancho Jesus Maria, founded by the Olivera family, was already more than half a century old.

One of Ira's first experiences was assisting an old vaquero in a day of calf-branding—to make things easier on his young helper, the old vaquero figure-eighted all 88 calves, never once letting his hondo touch the ground.

Deeply impressed by the expert use of the reata and spade bit, young Ira learned to speak, read, and write Castilian Spanish in order to be able to learn directly from the vaquero masters. This was the legacy Ira passed on to his sons, all four of whom became outstanding California reined horsemen.

## ~ Ray Shares His Memories ~



***Your father and uncles started out on the Rancho Jesus Maria, which was where Vandenberg Air Force Base now is. How did they come to move to the northern part of the state?***

**Ray:** Because of the drought in Santa Barbara County, Ed and Adolph moved their cattle to Mendocino County in 1898, driving them all the way. They drove them through San Francisco, ferrying them across the San Francisco bay, ending up in Willits, California. This was a distance of over 400 miles. In 1900, When Dad was 21, he went to work at San Luis for \$40 a month. Lem Castle was the vaquero boss there, and he was the one Dad credited as teaching him the most. They all spent a lifetime at vaquero work, and learned directly from the old vaquero masters who had spent a lifetime at it.

***When and how did you get started as a vaquero?***

**Ray:** My earliest memories of riding were with my father. He would put me on the

horse in front of him when they were moving cattle. From then on, my greatest teachers were my father and older brothers, Kent and Oliver. I was riding on my own by the time I was six or seven.

***When did you first hear about Morgans?***

**Ray:** As early as I can remember, Father would talk about Morgans being the best horses. A lot of the ranches had Morgans or part Morgans in their cavvy. Many were probably not registered but could have been . . . they were at least 3/4 or 7/8 Morgan blood, beautiful horses. The horses Father and my brothers rode were mostly Morgan.

***Did your family have a ranch?***

**Ray:** What my father, my uncles, and my brother Kent did in those days was just lease the land by the acre. It was cheap to do that then, maybe two bits an acre. Then you would start off with a few head of cattle and you were in the cattle business.

***What kind of cattle did the vaqueros have?***

**Ray:** The cattle of the early California vaquero were a Longhorn strain descend-

ing from the old Spanish cattle. They were tough wiry animals weighing 700– 800 lbs, and they could run fast and hide in the brush. They were all colors of the rainbow. We called them “Streamliners” or “Sport Models.” Before the war, a foreman would get \$75 a month, and a vaquero would get \$60 a month. \$75 was the price of a new Visalia saddle.

***How did the war affect your business?***

**Ray:** Three of us Ordway brothers served in the military during World War II. I was 18 and spent three years in the armed forces, mostly in a training command at Westover airfield in Massachusetts. My younger brother, Jack, wanted to go in the navy; he was stationed on a battleship off Japan, and Oliver was shot down off Guadalcanal and spent several months in the VA hospital. Prior to this, my younger brother Jack and I had accumulated a small herd of cattle which we sold when we joined the military.

***What did you do when you came back from the war?***

**Ray:** After returning home from the war I went to work for the Jack Ranch in





## Traditional Spanish Equipment

The vaqueros took great pride in their equipment, much of it often handmade. The bosals and mecate reins, the bits all had important practical roles. But the ornamental silver and leather tooling also comes from this Western tradition. Some of the equipment pictured here, such as Kent Ordway's saddle, is vintage and historically important.



1937 Olson Nolte saddle owned by Ray's oldest brother Kent. This was originally a center-fire saddle, but was modified in 1954 to a 3/4th rigging. After Kent passed away, Ray unexpectedly came across this saddle for sale in a saddle shop in 1958. Recognizing his brother's saddle, of course Ray had to have it, and bought it back for \$250.



Photos by Jo Johnson, who happens to be pictured on this month's cover, include some of her mecates and spurs.



silver horseshoe reata buckle; silver work on cantle;



silver work on half breed bit; engraved silver work on stirrup; Olson Nolte saddle maker inscription.



Henry in hackamore with three quarter size bosal and horsehair mecate.

Ray's silver spurs.

Ordway branding iron—larger size for cattle.



Ray's rawhide reata.



1932 Visalia saddle, originally center-fire, modified to 5/8ths. Originally owned by Ed Connell, the author of Hackamore Reinsman and Reinsman of the West. Ed worked for Ray's brother Kent, and he sold the saddle to Kent. During the time Kent owned it, he took a hunting party out, and unfortunately a man who was riding the horse with this saddle was accidentally killed and had to be packed out. The saddle laid out there for a week before Kent was able to retrieve it. He then gave it to Ira (his and Ray's father) and the saddle later ended up with Ray, who started a lot of colts with it.



horsehair mecate tied to use as lead rope.





Cholame starting colts. They used Morgan studs and these were some of their colts. I also worked for H. Moffat & Co. and some other cattle companies in the San Joaquin Valley. I was starting colts for nine different outfits and the standard wage for a vaquero after the war was \$150 a month.



**Didn't your brother have a ranch that you managed for awhile?**

**Ray:** Yes, Kent and his wife owned the Vasco Ranch in Livermore, CA. After he passed away in 1954, I managed the ranch for a couple of years, and eventually started up my own cattle business, leasing the land for \$3.25 an acre. The price kept going up; went up to \$11 an acre and then \$18 so it was no longer profitable. After that I worked from daylight to dark, first for \$8, then \$10 a day for various ranches and starting colts.

**What age were the colts you started?**

**Ray:** I started a lot of four and five-year-olds. The vaqueros did not like to start them too young because a colt does not get all his teeth until he is seven-years-old, and a mare by six. This is good for Morgans too, because they are a slow maturing horse.

**How did you meet Roland and Russell Hill?**

**Ray:** I met Roland Hill at his Santa Ana Valley ranch in San Benito County, where he kept his brood mares, but mostly I knew his brother Russell and kept in touch with him all his life. I first met Russell Hill in 1958 when he called me to help gather cattle on his Mariposa ranch. I told Russell I saw a nice Morgan stallion and a couple Morgan mares running out in a field and asked about them. He said that the stallion was old Sonfield and he was 21 years old, but didn't look it.

**What other Morgans do you remember?**

**Ray:** I started three nice registered Morgan colts, a brown, a black, and black chestnut/flaxen for the Potter Estate at El Nido. The brown colt was exceptional, he acted like he already knew what was expected of him. After about the third time I rode him,

some men in big hats drove by and proceeded to stare at this colt. They bought him from the estate. This turned out to be Bruce Harrington of New Hall Cattle Company, and he wanted this colt for his own personal horse.

**What other ranches did you know of that had Morgans?**

**Ray:** Most of the ranches I worked on had Morgans or part Morgans. There was the Jack Ranch, which started in the 1880s. H. Moffat & Company, where I worked after the war, bought 30 head of good Morgan yearlings from the Bixby Ranch. There was also the Ingomar Ranch, Division of H. Moffat & Company in Gustine—these colts had Morgan sires and the dams were part Morgan. A lot of good Morgans were never registered and became absorbed into the Quarter Horse breed because that became popular and everybody wanted in on the dollar.

**Why did the vaqueros like Morgans?**

**Ray:** Morgans had a good back for the type of saddle they rode. As Russell Hill would say, 'They've got a place for a saddle.' The Morgan horse was very smart, quick learning, gentle and enduring, and most were not bad buckers. A Morgan will stand for no roughness, so the vaquero style of training worked extremely well for them. The vaqueros also liked the Morgans because of their strong resemblance in both appearance and character to the old Spanish horses; I think they both went back to Barb ancestors. A sport horse type Morgan is an ideal stock horse for the Vaquero. Many of the Morgans in the early days were used for long distance and stagecoach work; these were all very useable horses, level headed with common sense and good dispositions. They had good lines, good action and were straight-gaited, upheaded, uphill horses, cracker-jacks. The best horses all had some Morgan blood in them.

**Who else did you know that liked the Morgans and had an impact on the vaquero traditions?**

**Ray:** Arnold Rojas. I met Rojas through Buster Clark and Russell Hill. This was in

the early '70s, Rojas was selling his books. He wrote many of the old vaquero stories and their history in his books, and he wrote about the Hills and some of the early Morgans in California even before Roland Hill started bringing them out in the 1920s. I credit Rojas with saving the spade bit; right after the war the Humane Society was about to outlaw it because a lot of people misunderstood it, misused it. What you look for is if the horse likes the bit, he will have a relaxed mouth. When a person is uptight, their mouth tightens. A horse is the same way. Actually, the bigger the spade, the less severe it is. The spade was not intended to be a leverage bit, but to signal the horse, and the difference is in good seat and hands. The spade gives the horse something to hold onto and keeps them relaxed—I've seen them take the spade and hold onto it even without a headstall.

**Who were best makers of old vaquero equipment?**

**Ray:** Visalia Stock Saddle Company—they were called Walker Saddles and Olsen Nolte Saddle Company. For bits, my father used Stern's in San Jose—Roland Hill used these too. When Roland would hire a new vaquero he would say, "If you are going to ride my horse, you use my bit." He had about a hundred of these bits locked in his trunk. Russell only had a couple different bits—he said the difference is in the hands holding the reins.



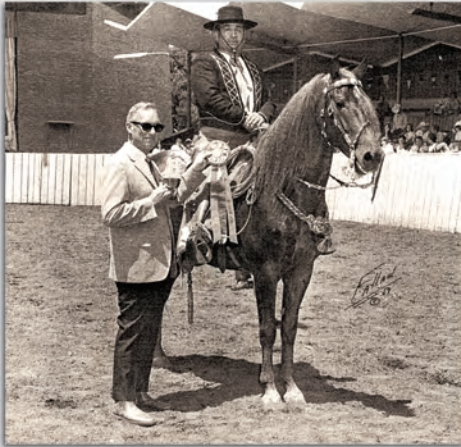
**Tell us about the Morgan you have now and how you came to buy him.**

**Ray:** His registered name is HMSTD Shuda Bin A Cowboy, bred by Janine Welsh of British Columbia. I call him 'Henry.' A lady bought this colt from Canada, then decided to sell the horse as she didn't really have time for him. Her vet was a friend of mine and knew he was just what I was looking for.





Bab Verdugo was from an old vaquero family that went way back in southern California. Ray knew Bab and his family, said Bab was up in the Grass Valley area when he met him and was competing with his Morgans in a lot of stock (all breed) classes at the time.



Bab Verdugo and Brookwood J P Dan # 13720 (Dapper Dan x Linden's Last by Linden Sonfield by Sonfield).



Bab Verdugo and Fonda K R 010791. This horse is registered as a brown 1959 mare by King's River Morgan (tracing to Woodbury through Peter's Ethan Allen 2nd) x Royce's Falcon. She left seven progeny, five geldings and two mares, the last was Florinda V Carter foaled in 1983, neither of which left any registered offspring.

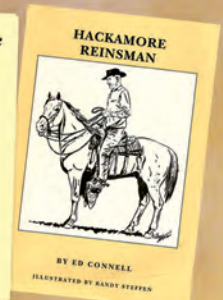
Ed Ordway,  
Ray's uncle,  
1st from left.  
Ira Ordway,  
Ray's father,  
4th from left,  
mounted on a  
Morgan,  
Willits, CA,  
1911.



## Vaqueros in History

The "West of the Rockies" vaquero culture of herding cattle on open ranges was adopted by ranchers all over America. At the same time, the costume and equipment of the early vaqueros were eschewed by horsemen from "East of the Rockies" partly to avoid association with a different language, race and culture. The easterners became cowboys and those west of the Rockies became known as Buckaroos (a literal translation of Vaquero as in buh-kare-oh). Today, the traditions, clothing, equipment, and the culture of these horsemen is studied in scholarly documents. The photos on this page show vaquero horsemen of generations ago in the clothes and equipment that accompanied them into work every day.

Cover shots of books by Ed Connell, Hackamore Reinsman illustrated by Randy Steffan and Reinsman of the West illustrated by Ernie Morris. Courtesy of Leslee Schwartz, daughter of Ed Connell. Ed Connell was a good friend of Ray Ordway, he worked for Ray's brother Kent. Ed was the first to ever write down simple, easy to follow and complete instructions for training a horse in the vaquero style. Ernie Morris, who illustrated the second book, is also a good friend of Ray's, and an old time vaquero, well known for his books, art, and rawhide braiding.



1910-11 photo of Ira's steer tying horse of Morgan descent. This horse has an original center-fire saddle and spade bit, both made by Stern. Marcus Stern came from Germany in 1852 to San Francisco, then moved to San Jose where he opened his famous saddle shop. All Stern's work was entirely handmade and very rare today. (Later as the Quarter Horse began to dominate, the backs of the horses were different and the saddles had to be modified. The 3/4 rig has the cinch halfway between the center-fire and rim-fire, and the 5/8 rig is halfway between the 3/4 and center-fire. 5/8ths is closest you can get today to the old center-fire.)



The Morgan stallion Sonfield, ridden by Roland Hill's daughter Jean Hill, was not only a finished bridle horse, he is a revered breeding stallion whose descendants have been able to carry a spade bit; Don McDaniel, shown here on Lippitt Morman, has contributed earlier writings on the Spade Bit (November, 2008) and on the bridle horses of Merle Little's El Rancho Poco (April, 2009) in The Morgan Horse; Merle Little in vaquero dress mounted on Sun Down Morgan in spade bit and bosalito; Jesse Wilkinson, grandfather of Ray's friend Ernie Morris, and an unidentified Morgan Chimeneas Ranch, 1934; Famed rancher Roland Hill, is frequently referenced in this article.





## The Tradition Today

They do not self-identify as vaqueros. That is really a term from another generation with, perhaps, its own specific lineage. But there are horsetrainers and working ranchers who today preserve the meticulous traditions of this very specialized discipline. Photos on this page prove the tradition is very much alive among and practiced on Morgan horses, as it was generations ago.



*Gab Creek Golden Vaquero.*



*Amberfields StarsNStripes, 2002 grulla Morgan gelding, owned by Theresa Sheridan.*



*Left to right: JaF Twilight Dream Dancer and Jo Johnson—hackamore clinic, September 2006; DLacey's Midnight Sun and Jo Johnson.*



*CanDon Battle Hill Ariel and Doug Cockrell.*

*Col. John Hutcheson on his junior stallion Gab Creek Golden Vaquero.*



### *Where is Henry in his training?*

**Ray:** Henry just needs work. The very early vaqueros would start a colt out directly in the hackamore. Since the 1930s, they introduce the snaffle bit first. I use a smooth, straight iron snaffle. Iron makes the saliva flow and keeps the mouth soft. You work a young horse about three times with just the snaffle, and then the snaffle under the hackamore. Next, you work him in just the hackamore until he is collected and gathered. Henry is in the hackamore now. I only put shoes on his back feet because keeping him barefoot in front will help him to gather. He will be ridden in the hackamore until he is ready for the double rein. Then he will go from the double rein into the bridle.



### *How do you know when the horse is ready for the next phase of training?*

**Ray:** He tells you. Each horse has their differences—even full brothers can be very different in disposition. He will get bored if you keep him back when he is ready to move along, but you have to be sensitive to understand what he is telling you. The horse is figuring you out just as fast as you are figuring him out, so just use plain common sense.

### *If you wanted to breed and raise a Morgan to train for a bridle horse, what would you look for in the sire and dam, in those bloodlines?*

**Ray:** I would look for action, ability to gather himself. I would want a horse that stands square and balanced, head up, good withers. A horse with a nice croup or rump, will be able to get his hind feet under him. I would look for a big honest eye, and willing disposition.

### *What is the difference between the “center-fire” and the “double-rig” or “rim-fire” type of saddle?*

**Ray:** The Morgan horse has the ideal back for the center-fire, which the old vaqueros liked. The center-fire has a single cinch at the midpoint between the fork and cantle.





Left to right: Ray tying on the reata; tying mecate reins to use as lead rope; Ray and Henry.



This saddle sits up on the horse's withers and the rider's weight is more balanced, and allows the horse freedom of movement at the shoulders. It needs to be adjusted often, but this helps the horse's back not to get sore. The double-rig sits back off the withers and has a double cinch; it was used by the cowboys east of the Rockies who preferred the hard and fast style of roping. The rim-fire would stay in place better, but it hurts the horse. They

would have to have several horses in their string because when they took the saddle off at the end of the day, it would take the hide right off the horse and he had to have time for his back to heal up.

**What are the main differences between the vaquero and the regular cowboy style of training?**

**Ray:** The vaquero uses scientific finesse and will patiently work with the horse for

as long as it takes to finish him. Gather is the same as collection in dressage. You must learn to gather your reins. Prepare and execute, so the horse knows what is coming. Good hands are very important. When you ride, the horse balances you. The horse will always try to stay under you if you lean. When he wants to buck, his goal is to unbalance you. The cowboy influence came more from Texas, or east of the Rockies, while the vaquero influence came into California through the Spaniards and was centered west of the Rockies. These were two completely different cultures, different equipment, and different methods. For example, in cutting, it boils down to Texas style being done on a loose rein, and California style being done bridled up. The Texas style of turn is done with heavy emphasis on the horse's front end. California style trained horses stop straighter, are more level, and at the turn they lift their bodies up. Texas style has the horse's front end very low and it remains there.

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**Can you think of any recent Morgans that really impressed you?**

**Ray:** One of the nicest stock horse types I've ever seen was the Morgan stallion Jo Johnson recently lost,

Can Don Joshua Danny. This was just a beautiful horse and he worked straight up in the bridle. I would consider him an ideal old style vaquero horse and excellent example of the Morgan stock horse.





**Quiet**, unassuming, and with infinite patience when it comes to a horse, Ray Ordway characterizes all that the term “vaquero” stands for in a way few living men can. He is, or has been, mentor and/or close confidante of some of the greatest names in western horsemanship. Ed Connell, the first man who painstakingly wrote down the details of vaquero training methods and published several books on it, used to work for Ray’s brother Kent. Ray was a friend of Arnold Rojas, one of the old school vaqueros who managed also to become a widely acclaimed Latino author in spite of having less than a third grade education, and whose books include many forgotten details on the Hill family and early California Morgans.

At eighty-five years young, Ray still rides, ropes with the reata, and is patiently developing his own young Morgan to become a bridle horse. He has become widely known as one of the very best of the true vaqueros.

In October 2007, Ray participated in a four day film shoot for the Essential Image Source Foundation’s project, “The Legacy of the California Vaquero,” [www.eisf.org](http://www.eisf.org). This historic work gathered a number of the country’s best vaqueros, and Ray was able to rope with Jay and Deeth Harney, thus representing three generations of California vaqueros ranging in age from 20s to 80s. Ray roped the head, Jay the heels and Deeth the front feet to lay

the calf down in a gentle manner, demonstrating the classic vaquero style of using the reata.

In September 2009, Ray became the first inductee into the California Ranch Horse Association Hall of Fame. Most recently, in November 2009, Ray was asked to participate in a video interview for the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming, which will be presented in May 2010. After a lifetime of living the vaquero traditions, Ray has dedicated his senior years to passing on this great legacy and heritage to younger generations who have discovered a new interest in these timeless methods, and he is an ambassador for the Morgan breed wherever he goes.

## GLOSSARY of Vaquero Terms

**bucharoo:** the Anglo version of the Spanish word, “vaquero.”

**cavvy:** from the Spanish word “cavieta,” sometimes called a “cavie.” Each rider has a “string” of assigned horses. When they are all together in a herd it is called a cavvy or a remuda.

**center-fire saddle:** saddle with a single cinch rigged halfway between the forks and the cantle

**chinks:** a style of short chaps that cover to just below the knee.

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Little Wood Rio Bravado - At stud  
Photo Courtesy of Linda Hasfurther.

Willowrun Hayli's Comette and exchange student  
Pernille Skodje, High School Rodeo Pole Bending.  
Photo Courtesy of Western Edge Photography.



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**cricket roller:** a type of small single roller that makes a chirping noise, used in the port of the half-breed or spade bit, helps the horse relax and accept the bit. According to Arnold Rojas, the noise made by the cricket is proportionate to the size of the silver conchos which amplify the sound, referred to as “freno de buen eco” or “bit of good eco.”

**concho:** from Spanish la concha, a metal disk, usually silver, for decoration on vaquero gear, such as bits, or set on a leather rosette of a saddle to secure saddle thongs.

**figure-eight roping:** old style of vaquero roping requiring rare skill—the rope is thrown with a single twisted loop where the top settles around the head of the steer or calf to immobilize him, just as the rope crosses itself in front of the animal’s chest, making the lower part of the figure-eight and forming a loop for him to step into, ideally with both front feet. This will gently draw his head and feet together to immobilize him so the vaquero can do the doctoring or work needed. The skill nearly died out but was kept alive by few old timers who wanted to preserve the 150+ years old tradition. In more recent years has become a popular contest at rodeos where cash prizes were offered for it.

**five-eighths rig saddle:** closest to the old center-fire, the cinch ring is moved forward slightly to halfway between the center-fire and the three-fourths position.

**hackamore:** (From Spanish “la jaquima.”) Headgear consisting of a rawhide nose piece that is braided over a rawhide core and suspended by a leather hanger or strap that runs behind the ears, and a 22 foot mecate tied into a set of reins. Hackamores consist of a nose button, bars and a heel knot and are measured at the bar. The vaquero horse is trained in a succession of hackamores and mecates beginning with the 3/4" and down thru the 5/8" and the 1/2" until he is ready for the two-rein. A mecate is never larger in diameter than the bars of the hackamore. Hackamores are sized so that there is room for a number of wraps of the mecate and so that it will all balance and leave a two finger spread. It takes 5-6 years or more to work through all the stages if done correctly. A mecate should never be left tied on the hackamore or it will distort the shape.

Over time the snaffle bit has worked its way into the training progression with many horses today started in the snaffle and then two reined into the hackamore.

**hondo:** the ring (metal, rope, or rawhide) through which the rope slides to make a loop.

**reata:** from Spanish la reata, “the rope,” hand-braided from rawhide. These take a long time to break in. Ray uses kidney talow to maintain his reata. In the old days they were frequently of 100 feet in length and today are most often 60 feet as opposed to the 28 foot rope used in pro rodeo.

**rim-fire:** saddle with a double cinch, the front cinch coming straight down from the fork or rim of the saddle. Preferred for

the Texas hard-and-fast style of roping, the rim-fire saddle would stay in place better without the cowboy needing to get down and make adjustments throughout the day as did the vaquero riding a center-fire saddle. However, these saddles were not kind to the horse, after a hard day of riding, when the cowboy removed the saddle, some of the horse’s hide was likely to come off with it, and so he had to have more horses in his string to rotate them and allow the horse’s back to heal up. Also, when roping from the rim-fire saddle, the pull of the rope was directly on the forks, causing the saddle to tilt forward and the forks to dig painfully into the horse’s shoulders.

**spade bit:** Used in the final stage of training the vaquero bridle horse. The spade is a signal bit, not a leverage bit. The well-trained bridle horse is said to “pack” or “carry” the spade bit, which fits comfortably in his mouth and gives him something to hold onto. Arnold Rojas wrote that the mouth piece of the spade should be at least 3 1/4" in length to work properly. There are variations in the length and shape of the spade mouth piece such as the true spade and the spoon spade. The full spade version is shaped like a regular spade, is flat and has a cricket and may have a roller.

**straight up in the bridle:** refers to a finished bridle horse, fully trained and ridden with a full spade bit and a bosalillo to honor the horse.

**three-fourths rig saddle:** cinch is moved forward to a position halfway between the center-fire and rim-fire.

**two-rein:** a step in training the bridle horse. After progressing through multiple, decreasingly smaller hackamores, the horse is introduced to a bit which he at first just carries with no reins or signal, being ridden with the mecate reins, then the romal is added to the bit and the horse is “two-reined” with the signal coming primarily from the mecate and over time coming primarily from the romal. Both sets of reins are used as required in the interim.

**vaquero:** Pronounced “buh-kare-oh,” the Spanish term for “man who takes care of cows.” From the Spanish word vaca, for cow.

## Photo Credits

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